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Powder a risk for women

Grant McArthur medical reporter

USING talcum powder, smoking and being overweight can increase women's risk of ovarian cancer

Early results from one of the world's biggest ovarian cancer studies also found that women who ate large amounts of red meat placed themselves at greater danger of the disease, while exercising may help reduce the risk

The Australian Ovarian Cancer Study, involving scientists from the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre and colleagues in Queensland and NSW, also revealed genetic reasons behind some women not responding to early ovarian cancer treatments

Primary investigator Prof David Bowtell, from Peter MacCallum, said the twin discoveries of genetic and lifestyle risk factors could point to future ways of combating the killer

"A single event of using talc or having a steak off a barbie is not going to give you ovarian cancer, but these things over a long period in combination are important," he said

"It is not as significant as the effect of smoking on lung cancer, but what we are trying to understand in the study is if these effects are more substantial if you are born with certain genes." In the study of 1500 women with ovarian cancer, the Victorian and NSW researchers are examining the genetic factors while their Queensland counterparts focus on the lifestyle risks

Publishing their work in the international journal Clinical Cancer Research this month, the Peter MacCallum team revealed the gene cyclin E was common among the one in five women who were resistant to ovarian cancer treatment

Scientists at the Queensland Institute of Medical Research released their early results to mark February as Ovarian Cancer Month, announcing that women who had several children or who used the contraceptive pill had lower chances of suffering the disease

"It's complex, but it seems that what it really comes back to is: don't be overweight, don't smoke and have a healthy diet that doesn't include too much red meat," said Dr Penny Webb from the Queensland Institute of Medical Research.

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